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ESSAY

By William Safire

WASHINGTON, Aug. 22—[illegible]

[illegible] Today, in his outdoor press conference, after a shaky start in which he seemed out of breath, he gained confidence answering a question about what he would have done if he had known a year ago about Watergate crimes: "I would have blown my stack—just as I did with Ziegler the other day." It was his most effective answer of the day.

The President is obviously under stress. The relentless television eye caught every nervous twitch in his cheek. But with the "Watergate press conference" behind him, some of that stress comes off.

The President does have a temper. He is not a plastic man; he is not a computer; he is emotional.

Rarely does he permit that temper to show. There was his "last press conference" a decade ago, at which he went through the roof, vowing later to never let his anger show in public again.

There was the time he referred to campus radicals who were throwing firebombs as "bums"; that was escalated by his critics into a Presidential characterization of all students, or all dissenters, as bums. Another time, [illegible] nomination was in [illegible] Nixon issued an intemperate [illegible] the Senate.

And now, [illegible] Ron Ziegler [illegible] Comparing the hum[illegible] a President is [illegible] his stack in public, Mr. [illegible] have been few and [illegible]

[illegible] course, he has shown [illegible] as every [illegible] and should.

[illegible] Mr. Justice [illegible] especially [illegible] to be [illegible] disturbed.

Presidents have men close to them who are under unspoken orders to not always follow spoken orders. When, in a moment of pique or vengefulness, a President barks an order or overemphasizes a direction, these men roll with the punch, delay, bring it back [illegible] fathers for reconsideration [illegible] ently [illegible] it.

That was one of the functions of Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, whose [illegible] was perceived [illegible] a barrier against those who wanted to get to the President but was also a barrier against information [illegible] considered [illegible] Haig and Ron Ziegler are [illegible] into that role today.

Not all the Presidents [illegible] so hardened or so [illegible] of the need for delay and more careful [illegible] view. Mr. Nixon has told us of his session with Egil Krogh, then [illegible] old, a "straight arrow" [illegible] highly motivated to carry out what he considered a super-patriotic [illegible] Krogh did not draw a [illegible] out and hired the plumber [illegible] the job.

At other times [illegible] tected himself [illegible] around him [illegible] nally, others [illegible] upon to take [illegible] of salt. Because [illegible] was this safety [illegible] of his orders [illegible] self privately [illegible]

[illegible] been the man [illegible]

A couple of years [illegible] President received [illegible] State Department [illegible] did not seem [illegible] was the elected representative [illegible] people [illegible] follow the President [illegible]

A note to Secretary of State William [illegible] said in effect "[illegible]

Bill Rogers [illegible] situation problem of replacement, that sort of thing."

The President gave the Secretary of State a funny look: "What was it [illegible] wanted?"

"To fire everybody in Laos, remember?"

The President laughed, shaking his head, "Hell, Bill—you know me better than that."